

# Zeros in Egyptian\*

Can nothing mean something?

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## Abstract

This paper deals with the use of zeros in Egyptian linguistics. It is argued that in most cases zeros are superfluous and misleading. Working in a structuralist framework, I suggest that a linguistic zero, in a narrow sense, must stand in a paradigmatic opposition and have a meaning of its own (*signifié*). To be fully operative, the notion of paradigmatic opposition should be maximally extended across the traditional borders of the word or of the nominal/verbal phrase. This done, the list of acceptable zeros is dramatically reduced.

## Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to review how Egyptologists use zeros. A quick look at the Egyptological literature suffices to show that the use of zeros is increasingly common. In doing so, Egyptologists probably are merely trying to conform to a general trend in general linguistics. Although I would not go as far as to say that inserting a zero is in every case unjustified, I have the feeling that zeros are too often an easy way out of what is probably a deeper problem. One of the most attractive virtues of zeros is that they can elegantly mask our ignorance. Instead of pushing the investigation harder, adding a zero presents itself as an easy solution. In this paper, I first give a classification of zeros before examining whether they are what they pretend to be. There are different kinds of zeros in the specialist literature. I first consider a group of very common zeros:

- orthographical Ø,
- historical Ø,
- pedagogical Ø.

### 1. Orthographical zeros

Orthographical zeros are the zero manifestation on the graphic level of an element one supposes to be present at the linguistic level. Due to the constraints of the hieroglyphic script, such zeros are not exceptional. Of course, the habits of scribes changed constantly over time. A relevant example of this is the graphic omission of the 1<sup>st</sup> singular suffix pronoun in Old Kingdom texts (Edel 1955-1964: § 160). Actually, the graphic manifestation of the 1<sup>st</sup> singular pronoun is none other than the determinative,

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which is a trace, so to say, of the pronoun and not the pronoun itself. It has convincingly been suggested that the images of the tomb's owner that accompany the texts may act suppletively as word determinatives. It is thus better to avoid speaking of a zero in such cases.

## 2. Historical zeros

A historical zero is sometimes introduced by Egyptologists to signal an element that was etymologically present in the history of a form or a pattern, but had disappeared at the time of the text under consideration. For instance, the preposition *hr* that is a constitutive part of the Present I pattern in Late Egyptian had completely disappeared by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> Dynasty. To put a zero, or to add the preposition *hr* in brackets, will help the modern reader to understand the intended construction. This of course can be of some use for distinguishing the different patterns hidden, for instance, under the pervasive and ambiguous Late Egyptian *iw.f sdm* forms. But one should also remain conscious that adding a zero is misleading, because it seems to suggest that when written the morpheme was still present at the morphophonemic level, which is rather dubious<sup>1</sup>.

## 3. Pedagogical zero

Finally, there are also instances of what may be labelled a pedagogical zero. For instance, in grammars one finds a lot of zeros in verbal paradigms that are meant to help visualize where the possible slots are. The figure below is taken from my own *Études de néo-égyptien*.

opérateurs syntactiques	convertisseur	négation	sujet	prédicat	
∅					
<i>iw</i>	∅	∅	<i>iw</i> + p. suf.	∅	inf.
( <i>nty</i> )	<i>wn</i>	<i>bn</i>	<i>iri</i> + SN	<i>r</i>	
sub.					

Fig. 1. Paradigm of the Future III (from Winand, *Études de néo-égyptien*, Liège, 1992, p. 489)

In conclusion, the zeros briefly reviewed here are impossible to define in any precise way. In some cases they are difficult to distinguish from one another: a historical zero can very easily become a pedagogical zero. They are not zeros in a linguistic sense.

## Other possible zeros




The most interesting zeros are the ones found in morphological or syntactic explanations. Here is a (non-exhaustive) list of such zeros:




1 The gradual disappearance of the preposition at the graphic level can be traced during the New Kingdom with some precision, see Winand (1992: §§ 635-649, 693-705, 785-793; 1995). The graphic manifestation is obviously later than the morphological reality.

- Ø in phonology and morphology
- Ø as part of a paradigm of substitutions
- Ø explained by the factorisation of a preceding element
- Ø in place of a resumptive element
- Ø in the so called ‘omission under relevance’
- Ø showing a reduction of valency
- Ø in place of a syntactic constituent
- Ø thought to be necessary to satisfy the postulates of a syntactic theory.

In what follows, I will review these different types of zeros. All of them raise a number of important issues that deserve close scrutiny. It is unfortunately impossible to go into details here. My ambition will be limited to giving some general orientation by considering a number of prototypical examples. It will soon become obvious to the reader that each type of zero could be studied in its own right.

### Ø in phonology and morphology

Zeros in phonology are common when one works in a diachronic perspective. They usually mean the disappearance of a phoneme. For instance, the LEg spelling  can have the following transcriptions: *h3b*, *h(3)b* or *hb*. The first one is the standard transcription, the one that is found in dictionaries, the other two try to capture something of the phonological evolution, but they do it in different ways. *h(3)b* seems to suggest that the missing *aleph* should be present, whereas *hb* indicates that the spelling actually reflects the new phonological reality (cf. **208**):  $3 > \emptyset$ . This raises a number of issues that were partly alluded to in the introductory section. All actually come down to a central question: what does a transcription really stand for? Is it a kind of substitute for the hieroglyphic spelling, its more or less trustworthy mirror? In this case, one should transcribe *hb* when the spelling is , but *h3b* if the verb is written . The problem is that divergent spellings can occur in the same text. If one prefers to consider that the transcription should be as close as possible to the phonological reality, the number of problems dramatically increases. One would be compelled to adapt the transcriptions to what is believed to be the phonology of, say, the 19<sup>th</sup> dynasty Late Egyptian without considering what is actually written. To come back to our example, it would mean that we should transcribe all triliteral verbs with an aleph as its second radical, A-3-C, as A-C. This of course presupposes very precise knowledge of Egyptian phonology, which is still out of reach. For the time being, the best solution seems to be to recognise that transcription is simply a means for identifying a lexeme and that it cannot serve as a substitute for the hieroglyphic spelling but rather only a more or less useful *pis-aller*.

Another interesting case is offered by the spelling of the definite article. In LEg, the masculine form is usually written , but  is also found. We can infer from Coptic that  is the precursor of the reduced form (**π**-). In some texts, both spellings are found: in P. Brooklyn 47.218.135 the article is always written in full, except when

it is used in conjunction with the relative *nty*, in which case  $\overline{\square\triangle\backslash}$  is written (31 times). But it is very unlikely that the article was realized differently. Now it is not all impossible that the reduced form was the signal of the phonological evolution of the whole syntagm (cf.  $\overline{\pi\epsilon\tau\epsilon}$ ). If this is the case, there is no opposition between  $p^3$  and  $p$ , with  $\beta > \emptyset$ , but there is an opposition between  $p^3$  NP vs.  $p$ -*nty*. The necessity of having a zero disappears completely when the wider picture is taken into account.

In morphology zeros are very often used, but in most cases it is unclear whether such zeros have any value at a synchronic level. The paradigm of the pseudo-participle is a good example. It is common knowledge that the rich set of personal suffixes of the Old Kingdom gradually became reduced to (almost) nothing (with the exception of particular cases). The evolutionary process is well illustrated in LEg. In phase I (18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> dyn.), the suffixes can be  $-k$ ,  $-t$ ,  $-y$ ,  $-wn$ ,  $-\emptyset$ ; in phase II (20<sup>th</sup> dyn.), the  $-wn$  suffix was dropped; in phase III (TIP), the set was reduced to a binary opposition between  $-t$  and  $-\emptyset$  (Winand 1992: § 246-249). This morphological evolution can be explained along what can be observed in syntax. In Egyptian I (Old and Middle Egyptian), the suffixes of the pseudo-participle could still to some degree be considered as personal suffixes. In Egyptian II (from LEg onwards), these suffixes become increasingly used only as agreement markers. The pseudo-participle was sometimes used as an independent predicate or as a second predicate in Egyptian I (including in frontal thematic position). From LEg onwards – at least in the non-literary texts – the pseudo-participle is never found outside the general frame Subject + Predicate. It was thus only to be expected that the suffixes would be felt as redundant, a very common typological phenomenon. Now, the question remains whether there is some reason to consider the absence of the suffix as a zero. In my opinion, there can be no question of a zero in this case, because it is impossible to assign it any *signifié*. The solution, once again, is to be found by considering the whole paradigm. In LEg III, the paradigm of the pseudo-participle is as shown in the figure below:

1 <sup>ST</sup> SG.	$-i \dots$ VB- $t$ VB- $\emptyset$
2 <sup>ND</sup> M. SG.	$-k \dots$ VB- $t$
2 <sup>ND</sup> F. SG.	$-t \dots$ VB- $t$
3 <sup>RD</sup> M. SG.	$-f \dots$ VB- $\emptyset$
3 <sup>RD</sup> F. SG.	$-s \dots$ VB- $t$
1 <sup>ST</sup> PL.	$-n \dots$ VB- $t$
2 <sup>ND</sup> PL.	$-tn \dots$ VB- $t$
3 <sup>RD</sup> PL.	$-w \dots$ VB- $\emptyset$

Fig. 2. The suffixes of the pseudo-participles in LEg III

The expression of the person now rests on the anteposed subject. There is no need to express it again in the inflection of the verb.

## Ø as part of a paradigm of substitutions

Zeros are sometimes introduced as parts of a paradigm of substitutions. The best candidate is undoubtedly the system of definition of the nominal syntagm. To the best of my knowledge, this has not been investigated in detail as far as pre-Coptic Egyptian is concerned<sup>2</sup>. In Coptic, the meticulous studies by A. Shisha-Halevy for Shenoutian Coptic (1986) and Bohairic Coptic<sup>3</sup> remain a model and a constant source of inspiration.

In LEg, it is well known that a noun can be preceded by a definite article (*p3*, *t3*, *n3*), a possessive article (*p3y.i*, *p3y.k*, etc.), an indefinite article (*wʕ*), a demonstrative (*p3y hrw* vs. *hrw pn*), a possessive prefix (*p3-n niwt*) or left undefined (Junge 1996: 54). The system of determination in LEg cannot be comprehensively understood *en bloc*. As was already pointed out by Junge, one has to be very careful not to mix texts from different genres and from different times.

Texts where the indefinite article (*wʕ*) is only partly used cannot be treated on a par with texts where it has gained full paradigmaticization (as in *Wenamun*). Texts that incorporate ancient, pre-Late Egyptian phraseology cannot be integrated in the same sub-system of LEg as contemporary texts that are grounded in what I have elsewhere called the ‘*néo-égyptien complet*’, see Winand (1992: § 22). This also applies to the use of *hn* as plural indefinite marker, which was not yet common in LEg even at the end of Ramesside period. As a consequence, zero enters different systems of oppositions. The main question I would like to address here is the very status of this alleged zero. Is it a zero in a narrow linguistic sense, or should the absence of a marker be better considered as a *nil*-mark? The difference between zero and *nil* might seem a Byzantine question at first sight, but the truth is that it is not (cf. Shisha-Halevy 2007: 371-374). The cardinal criteria seem to be the notion of substitution **and** the necessary structural interface between a *signifié* and a *signifiant*.

The text of *Wenamun* has been taken to illustrate the different questions that inevitably arise when dealing with the LEg determination system. As already said, the necessarily partial and incomplete conclusions that can be drawn cannot be automatically and blindly applied to other LEg texts. A series of comprehensive, corpus-based studies would be a necessary preliminary step before a more general assessment can be made on the LEg determination system as a whole.

The determination system in *Wenamun* is built on three elements: the definite article, the singular indefinite article and Ø or absence of a marker. *hn* is attested only once in *Wenamun*, where it retains its etymological value of ‘a certain quantity of’ (LES 63,2). To fully understand the complexity – in fact the richness – of the system, one cannot mechanically sort out nouns according to the presence or absence of a determiner without taking into account their semantic value and their syntactic environment. One can identify six semantic categories of nouns in *Wenamun*: count nouns, proper nouns (individuals, gods and geographic entities), nouns of function,

2 The only notable exception is the pioneering work of Groll for Late Egyptian (1967); see also Groll (1991). See also, for the emergence of the definite article, Loprieno (1980), that should be reviewed against the evidence of the growing Middle Kingdom corpus of non-literary texts.

3 Shisha-Halevy (2007: esp. on p. 368-376, but see the rich index s.v. Zero for more entries).

mass nouns, collective nouns and abstract nouns.

Only the count nouns make a regular use of the opposition between indefinite and definite article:

- 1: *mtw.k di.t [ir]y.tw n.k w<sup>c</sup> wd*  
 CONJ.2MS give\INF do\SUBJ.PAS to.2MS IND.ART stele  
 “(Why do you not rejoice) and have a stele made for you?” (LES 72,12)
- 2: *mtw.f ʕš rn.k hr pʒ wd*  
 CONJ.3MS shout\INF name.2MS on DEF.ART stele  
 “and he will read aloud your name on the stele” (LES 73,4)

When undefined, this category of nouns is used without a determiner, and instead of *w<sup>c</sup>*, in the following circumstances:

- in the plural (ex. 3); *hn* appears only one, but with its original meaning of ‘a certain quantity of’ (ex. 4):

- 3: *iw.w ʒtp m ʒh.t n km.t*  
 CIRC.3PL load\PSP with goods.F of Egypt.F  
 “being loaded with Egyptian goods” (LES 67,15-16)
- 4: *i.ir nhw dy (r)-kʒr-n.i*  
 do\IMP some day here near.1S  
 “Spend some days here near me!” (LES 63,2)

- when used with numerals, nouns are headed by a determiner if defined (ex. 5). If undefined, they do not have any determiner; in this case, there is a difference in the word order according to the register which the scribe is following. When enumerating lists of goods, he usually follows what can be called the booking style: in this case, the order is material + measure + number (ex. 6). Otherwise, the order is number (+ ind. gen.) + noun (ex. 7):

- 5: *hr ptr di.k iry pʒy ntr ʕ pʒy hrw 29*  
 but look give\PF.2MS do\SUBJ this god great this day 29  
 “but look, you let this great god pass those 29 days” (LES 69,11-12)<sup>4</sup>
- 6: *iw.i gm ḥd dbn 30 im.s*  
 SEQ.1s find\INF silver deben 30 in.3FS  
 “and I found 30 deben of silver therein” (LES 64,3-4)
- 7: *m-dr iry.w 17 n rnp.t m pʒy tʒ*  
 after do\SUBJ.3PL 17 of year in this land  
 “after they passed 17 years in this land” (LES 72,6)<sup>5</sup>

- as object of certain verbs, where it signals a semantically close unit (ex. 8). It is difficult to say how far these units were considered as new lexical units. The

4 One actually expects *pʒy 29 n hrw* (cf. also LES 64,14: *iw.i ir hrw 29 m tʒy.f[mr]*). The scribe here partly followed the manner found in dates (day + number), which is reflected by the spelling of *hrw*, which is written with the sun-sign only. This is in perfect accordance with the writings found in the beginning of the text (*hrw n wd i.ir smsm hʒy* [61,1], *hrw n spr i.ir.i r dʕn.t* [61,4]), but contrasts with the full spelling of *hrw* found elsewhere in the text (LES 63,2).

5 Cf. *r dbh n.i 50 n rnp.t n ʕnh m-di inn* “to ask for me 50 years of life from Amun” (LES 73,1-2); *iw.i nw r 11 n br* “and I noticed 11 ships” (LES 73,10).

fact that other elements, like a subject, can sometimes appear between the verb and its object might suggest that the lexicalisation is still in progress (ex. 9)<sup>6</sup>:

8: *in mntk p3 nty i.ir.f nw iy n.i m-mn.t*  
INTER IND.PR.2MS DEF.S REL do\EMPH.3MS time come\INF to.1S daily  
“Are you not you the one who has spent time coming to me daily?” (LES 65,12)<sup>7</sup>

9: *m dy t3y h3ty.k sh.r.w*  
NEG.IMP give\NVC take\SUBJ heart.2MS trouble.PL  
“Do not let your heart worry!” (LES 74,8)

– as predicate of a nominal predication:

10: *in ink b3k n p3 ir wd.k m-r-ε*  
INTER IND.PR.1S servant of DEF.S do\PARTIC send\INF.2MS too  
“Am I a servant of the one who did send you either?” (LES 68,8)<sup>8</sup>

– when preceded by *ky* or followed by the quantifier *nb*. When *ky* is used alone, it behaves like a regular count noun when defined, but *wε ky* does not seem to be attested in LEg.

11: *r tm di.t ptr sw k.t ir.t*  
to NEG give\INF see\SUBJ PR.DEP.3MS other eye  
“to not let any eye see it” (LES 65,9)<sup>9</sup>

12: *p3 nb n mnš nb*  
ART.DEF lord of boat every  
“the lord of every boat” (LES 69,9)<sup>10</sup>

– when a negation is present (ex. 13)<sup>11</sup>. Interestingly enough, in ex. 14, the fronted undefined subjects have not left a trace in the subject slot:

13: *in mn 20 n mnš dy m t3y.i mr*  
INTER NEG.PRED 20 of boat here in ART.POSS.1S harbour  
“Are there not 20 ships here in the harbour?” (LES 67,4)<sup>12</sup>

6 One can here draw a parallel with the lexicalization process of the causative pattern *rdi* + *sdm.f*. Here additional phenomena, like the reinterpretation of the subjunctive as an infinitive, as illustrated by numerous LEg examples, show that the history of the Coptic *τ*- causatives is much more complex than is usually assumed.

7 Cf. *tw.i εš sgb r p3 lbn* (LES 68,8-9); *mk i.ir imn hrw m t3 p.t* (LES 68,15-16); *twk εhε.tw r iry šw n p3 lbn m-di imn p3y.f nb* (LES 69,13-14); *iw.w ir pr.t im h3ε* (LES 71,8).

8 Cf. *mntk m-r-ε, mntk b3k n imn* (LES 70,4), on the meaning of *m-r-ε*, see Winand (2009a: ex. 6). See also *hn it3y iw ns-sw p3y.t3 p3 ...* (LES 62,13); *mk mntk m3ε.tw* (LES 66,8-9); *in f3y-mlk p3 wn.w ir.f n p3y.i it* (LES 68,6-7); *bn mšc swg3 iwn3 n3 nty tw.i im.w* (LES 69,5-6); LES 72,9; 72,10; 73,5.

9 Cf. *m-s3 ky hrw* (LES 73,3).

10 Cf. *i.ir.tw grg m dmi nb* (LES 75,8-9).

11 The presence of a negation can trigger different syntactic solutions in LEg: compare *ir p3 w3h nb dr.t.f hr dr.t.i im.w, iw.i r di n.f 3h.t.i, ir p3 nty bwpw.f di.t Ø n.i, bn iw.i r di n.f m 3h.t.i* “as for the one among them who laid his hand on mine, I will give him my goods; as for him who did not give to me, I will not give him of my goods. (KRI VI, 238,1-2). On the indirect expression of the direct object (DOM), see Winand (in press). For an example of a negated sentence with *nb*: *mn br nb hr-tp itrw iw bn ns-sw imn* (LES 69,6-7); for an example with *ky*: *mn k.t 50 br nim* (LES 67,7), with the expected gender agreement between *k.t* and *br*.

12 In cleft sentence (LES 66,2-3), in vetitive (LES 73,12).

- 14: *hr mk wh3 šc.t mn m dr.t.k*  
 but look rescript letter.F NEG.PRED in hand.F.2MS  
 “So, as it seems, rescript, letter, there is nothing in your hand!” (LES 66,9)<sup>13</sup>

- when used with the so-called *m* of equivalence, probably because of the attributive meaning of the construction:

- 15: *mnš.w ... iw.w m hbr irm ns-sw-b3-nb-dd*  
 boat.PL ... CIRC.3PL in commerce with Smendes  
 “boats ... that are in commercial relations with Smendes” (LES 67,5)

- in some lexicalized expressions, in an etymologically direct genitive construction such as the ubiquitous *nswt ntr.w* “king of the gods” or *nb ns.wt ʔ.wj* “lord of the thrones of the Double Land”. These expressions are probably treated synchronically as personal names.
- in apposition with an adjectival force (ex. 16); this can be contrasted with explanatory apposition, where the indefinite article is regularly found (ex. 17):

- 16: *p3y.f wpwty rmt*  
 ART.POSS.3MS deputy man  
 “his human deputy” (LES 72,14)

- 17: *iw.i spr r dyr wšc dmi n tkr*  
 SEQ.1S reach\INF to Dor IND.ART city of Tjekker  
 “and I reached Dor, a Tjekker city” (LES 61,11)

- with some words expressing a division of time:

- 18: *smn tw š3c dw3w*  
 remain\IMP DEP.PR.2MS until tomorrow  
 “remain (here) until tomorrow” (LES 65,10)<sup>14</sup>

The proper nouns in the text can be divided into two categories: geographical names and personal names, divine and non-divine. Neither category takes the article, but geographical names can take a demonstrative when they are determined, for instance by a relative clause (ex. 19). However, *Lbn* is always defined (LES 68,9, 69,8 and 69,13). The lack of an article shows that *nīwt*, in the sense of ‘Thebes,’ was treated as a proper name (LES 75,7). The same conclusion seems to apply to *rsw* ‘the South,’ but note the presence of the article with *mhw* with a genitival extension<sup>15</sup>:

- 19: *ir p3y d-d-n p3 ky i.sn.k r.f*  
 TOP DMS Sidon DEF.M other REL.pass.2MS to.3MS  
 “as for that Sidon, the other one you have passed by” (LES 67,6)

- 20: *... š3c-i.ir.t.f šm r rsw*  
 till-do\TERM.3MS go\INF to south  
 “till I return to the South” (LES 70,12)

13 For the meaning of *mk* in this sentence, see Winand (2004: ex. 8).

14 Cf. *iw dw3 hpr* (LES 66,1).

15 For the nouns related to cardinal directions, this reflects the difference between their uses as the name of a region and or as a geographical position.



- 17 The use of an indefinite article in this environment is not attested in *Wenamun*, but see *iw.w pš w<sup>c</sup> hd* (KRI VI 782.4).

- 29: *wḥ3*            *p3y.i*            *ḥd*  
 seek\IMP        POSS.ART.1S    silver  
 “Look after my silver!” (LES 62,6)

Finally abstract nouns and unicons do not take an article (ex. 30)<sup>18</sup>. There are sometimes very subtle variations. The word *ḥnḥ* ‘life’ can appear either with a definite article or without any article. In the first case, it seems to mean ‘Life’, as a unique principle (ex. 31), whereas in the second case it is more or less treated like a mass noun, something one can partake in (ex. 32):

- 30: *i.ir.tw*                    *grg*            *m*    *dmi*    *nb*,  
 do\EMPH.NEUTER        falsehood    in    city    every  
*i.ir.tw*                    *m3ḥ.t*            *m*    *p3*            *t3*    *n*    *irs3*  
 do\EMPH.IMPERS        truth.F        in    DEF.M    land    of    Irsa  
 “Everywhere, one does falsehood, but in the land of Irsa, one does justice.”  
 (LES 75,7-8)<sup>19</sup>

- 31: *ḥr*    *ir*    *imn-rḥ*    *nswt-ntr.w*  
 but    TOP    Amun-Ra    king-god.PL  
           *mntf*                    *p3*                    *nb*    *n*    *p3*                    *ḥnḥ*    *snb*  
           IND.PR.3MS        DEF.M            lord    of    DEF.S        life    health  
 “For Amun, king of the gods, He is the lord of Life and Health.” (LES 69,2-4)

- 32:    30    *rnp.w.t*            *n*    *ḥnḥ*  
       30    year.PL.F        of    life  
       “30 years of life” (LES 73,1)

To sum up this rather long discussion, even where linguistic zeros seem highly commendable (e.g. in determination of nouns), it is not at all clear whether one should posit a zero in each case of a bare noun. Actually, in the majority of the cases reviewed above zeros do not enter a paradigmatic opposition. With count nouns there is a predictable opposition between *iw p3 rmt (ḥr) sdm* and *iw wḥ rmt (ḥr) sdm*, but *iw Ø-rmt (ḥr) sdm* does not exist in *Wenamun*. In cases where there is a bare count noun, there is an opposition between *ink p3 rmt* and *ink rmt*, but *ink wḥ rmt* does not seem to be an option. In other words, there is no syntactic pattern where *wḥ rmt* and *Ø-rmt* would stand in opposition, but it is hard to avoid a zero in *Ø-rmt* in opposition to *p3 rmt* in the nominal predicate. The other productive class where such an opposition actually exists is that of mass nouns. In this case there is a productive and meaningful

18 I cannot discuss here the question of generically used count nouns; usually they take a definite article in LEG: *mwt.fn p3 msh*, *m-r-pw p3 ḥ3w*, *mitt p3 iw* (LES 1,6). In *Wenamun* the well-known sentence *y3 m3i mr 3ḥ.t.f* (LES 70,8-9), is usually translated “a lion loves his possessions” (e.g., Lichtheim 1976: 227), and *m3i* is understood as a generic noun. However, given the absence of an article, this should rather be better rendered, considering the absence of an article, as “for he (Amun) is a lion who loves his possessions”, i.e. as a nominal predication of the type A Ø common in pragmatically loaded sentences. One may note in passing that there is a regular opposition in LEG between A *p3y* and A Ø, the latter being used to convey some emphasis. As expected, it is always negated by *bn ... iwn3* (cf. *d3, bn mḥ swg iwn3 n3 nty twi im* (LES 69,5-6), while with A *p3y*, *iwn3* remains optional, see Winand (1997).

19 Cf. *ḥr i.ir mnḥ.t pr im.fr pḥ r p3 nty twi im*, *ḥr i.ir sb3 pr nim.fr pḥ r p3 nty twi im* “for efficiency indeed came from there to reach the place where I am, and wisdom indeed came from there to reach the place where I am” (LES 69,2-4).

opposition between  $\emptyset$ -*ht* ‘wood’,  $w^c$ -*ht* ‘a piece of wood’ and  $p^3$ -*ht* ‘the wood.’ Zero is a part of a paradigmatic opposition (*signifiant*) and has a positive meaning (*signifié*). It is thus acceptable in this case to speak of a linguistic zero, whereas it seems better to consider that in the other cases there is an absence of marking (or *nil*)<sup>20</sup>.

### $\emptyset$ explained by the factorisation of a preceding element

Zeros are also sometimes advocated to explain coordinated nominal syntagms. It is obviously impossible to treat this important issue in detail here, but a few remarks might be useful. In what follows, I am only interested in prepositional phrases. In LEg, the following patterns are attested:

#### 1. Prep + PN<sub>1</sub> + PN<sub>2</sub> + ... :

- 33: *iw.tw di.tf m-b3h kdnndnn b<sup>c</sup>r-mhr p<sup>3</sup>-ir-swnt dhwtj-rh-nfr*  
 SEQ.IMP give\INF.3MS before K. B. P. D  
 “and one placed him in front of Kedjendenen, Balmeher, Pairswnet and Djehuty-rekhnefer”  
 (KRI V 357,8-9)

#### 2. Prep + PN<sub>1</sub> + PN<sub>2</sub> + Prep + PN<sub>3</sub> :

- 34: *twi dd n imn-r<sup>c</sup> nsw.t-ntr.w mwt h<sup>c</sup>nsw, n p<sup>3</sup>-r<sup>c</sup>-hr-3hty (...),*  
 PR.PR.1.IS say\INF to A. king-god.PL Mut Khonsu to P.  
*n imn ns.t t3.wy (...), n imn-wsr-h3.t h<sup>c</sup>n<sup>c</sup> psd.tf,*  
 to Amun seat land.DUAL to A. with Ennead.F.3MS  
*n ntr nb ntr.t nb (...)*  
 to god every god.F every  
 “I say to Amun-Re, king of the gods, Mut and Khonsu, to Prehorakhty (...), to Amun of the seat of the Two Lands (...), to Amunuserhat with his Ennead, to every god and every goddess (...)”  
 (LRL 14,2-5)

#### 3. Prep + $p^3$ -N<sub>1</sub> + $p^3$ -N<sub>2</sub>:

- 35: *irm p<sup>3</sup> nbw p<sup>3</sup> h<sup>c</sup>d*  
 with DEF.M gold DEF.M silver  
 “with the gold and the silver”  
 (KRI VI 498,2)<sup>21</sup>

#### 4. Prep + $p^3$ -N<sub>1</sub> + Prep + $p^3$ -N<sub>2</sub>:

- 36: *irm n<sup>3</sup> hry.w mnš irm n<sup>3</sup> šm*  
 with DEF.PL captain.PL ship with DEF.PL go\PTCP  
 “with the ship captains and with those who are going”  
 (LES 63,5)

#### 5. Prep + $p^3$ -N<sub>1</sub> + $\emptyset$ -N<sub>2</sub>:

- 37: *n n<sup>3</sup> ntr.w ntr.wt nb.w*  
 to DEF.PL god.PL god.PL.F all.PL  
 “to all the gods and goddesses”  
 (KRI III 230,8-9)

20 As E. Grossman kindly points out to me, the functional load of  $w^c/\text{OY}$  in Demotic and Coptic expands considerably vis-à-vis LEg. The paradigmization of *hn* in latest Demotic and early Coptic is also worth noting. In this respect, the behaviour of  $w^c/\emptyset$  in P. Vandier seems closer to Demotic than LEg (see Shisha-Halevy 1989: 429-430).

21 Cf. *irm p<sup>3</sup>y šri t3y šri.t* (P. Louvre 25365+pAberdeen 171i).

6. Prep + *p3*-DN<sub>1</sub> + *hn*<sup>c</sup> + *p3*-DN<sub>2</sub>:

- 38: *m-b3h nb-r-dr hn<sup>c</sup> t3 psd.t r-dr.s*  
 before Lord-of-All with DEF.F Ennead whole.3FS  
 “before the Lord-of-All and the whole Ennead” (LES 40,9)

7. Prep + *p3*-N<sub>1</sub> + *m-mitt* + Prep + *p3*-N<sub>2</sub>:

- 39: *iw.k dd.f n mhhy m-mitt n p3-hry-pd.t m-mitt m-bi3.t*  
 FIII.2MS say\INF.3MS to M. likewise to P. likewise to\_the\_contrary  
 “Will you mention it to Mehehy as well, and to Paherypedjet too or not?”  
 (KRI III 540,6-8)

8. Prep + suff. pr. + Prep + *p3*-N<sub>2</sub>/PN<sub>2</sub>:

- 40: *irm.f irm n3 rmt nb.w*  
 with.3MS with DEF.PL men all.PL  
 “with him and with all the people” (KRI VI 523,4-5)

There is a large array of possibilities: the preposition may be repeated or not, and the second (and subsequent) syntagm(s) may be coordinated to the first one by a special preposition (like *hn*<sup>c</sup>)<sup>22</sup> or a lexical expression (*m-mitt*).

The repetition or the non-repetition of the preposition can be

- a syntactic constraint as in ex. 40, where the first syntagm is pronominal,
- a cohesive device, as in ex. 37 (also note the non-repetition of the definite article before *ntr.wt*, which reinforces the cohesion<sup>23</sup>),
- a way of grouping nominal syntagms into larger thematic units (as in the enumeration of the gods in ex. 34).

Among these patterns there is only one undisputable case of a linguistic zero, namely the absence of the definite article in pattern # 5. For coordinating nominal syntagms headed by a preposition, asyndesis is the rule in Late Egyptian. The repetition of the preposition or the introduction of specialized connective devices like *hn*<sup>c</sup> or *m-mitt* are exceptions<sup>24</sup>; they should rather be considered as stylistic means.

## Ø in place of a resumptive element

This type of zero is sometimes advocated to explain certain syntactic structures. A well-known case is the relative clause. I will deal with this briefly later in this paper when discussing the case of zeros in place of a syntactic constituent (cf. *infra*).

22 It should be noted that *irm* does not seem to function as a coordinator, at least not in the same syntactic environment (but *irm* is common to avoid the coordination of two subjects: *iw A B hr sdm* is extremely rare, but *iw A hr sdm irm B* is very widespread). This perhaps forces us to reconsider the structural relations between *hn*<sup>c</sup> and *irm*. Considering *irm* as the direct diachronic successor of *hn*<sup>c</sup> probably does not do justice to the complexity of the system.

23 The sequencing is also very clear in the following example: [*r sip n3*] *is.w n n3 nswt tpj.w-<sup>c</sup> hn<sup>c</sup> n3 m<sup>c</sup>h<sup>c</sup>.wt s.wt n htp n n3 hsy.w* (KRI VI 468,8-9), where *hn*<sup>c</sup> marks the boundary between royal and non-royal, the non-royal tombs (*m<sup>c</sup>h<sup>c</sup>.wt* and *s.wt*) being closely grouped by the non-repetition of the definite article. This kind of grouping is also found with the possessive article: *iw.n ir.t p3y nbw i.gm.n m p3y ntr 2 m n3y.w s3h.w wd3.w pr wt.w m 8.t dni.t* (KRI VI 485,7-9).

24 In this context, one should also consider the occasional presence of *m-mitt* before a conjunctive.

A good illustration here might be the particular case of the causative construction (*rdi sdm.f / sdm.tw.f*), when the verb *rdi* is itself conjugated in a relative form. In LEg, the resumptive pronoun is often omitted where it might have been expected<sup>25</sup>. In ex. 41, the omitted element is the subject of a passive, in ex. 42 it is the object of a transitive verb, and in ex. 43 it is the subject of an intransitive:

- 41: *idr knw n i3w.t rdi.n.f in.tw Ø n nswt-bity*  
 herd numerous of cattle.F give\REL.ACC.3MS bring\SUBJ.PASS Ø to king  
 “numerous herds of cattle that he caused to be brought to the King of Upper and Lower Egypt” (KRI II 283,5)
- 42: *ir t3 md3.t n p3 h3d i.di.k sfh.i Ø*  
 TOP DEF.F letter.F of DEF.M silver REL.give.2MS liquidate\SUBJ.1S  
 “as for the letter of the credit which you caused me to liquidate” (KRI III 252,7-8)
- 43: *p3 kr i.di.i hn Ø n.f 3tp <m> hm3.t*  
 DEF.M boat REL.give.1S go\SUBJ<sup>26</sup> to.3MS load\PSP.3MS <with> salt  
 “the boat, I sent it to him laden with salt” (LRL 59,10-11)

In Late Egyptian the absence of the resumptive pronoun in such syntactic environments, though widespread, is not systematic. There are some rare examples where the resumptive pronoun appears:

- 44: *mi-ḳd n3y rmt i.di p3y.i nb ʕw.s in.tw.w*  
 like DEM.PL men REL.give POSS.ART.1S lord lph bring\SUBJ.PASS.3PL  
 “as those men which my lord, l.p.h., caused to be brought” (RAD 14,10)
- 45: *p3 di.k in.f sw r [hry]*  
 DEF.M give\REL.2MS bring\SUBJ.2MS DEP.PR.3MS to [above]  
 “this that you caused him to bring up” (O. DeM 554, v° 7)

It remains questionable whether a zero is needed to explain this kind of alternation, seeing that the argument structure of the verb provides all the necessary information. In ex. 41 the verb *ini* presupposes the presence of three arguments: a subject, which is normally the agent, an object, which is the patient, and [‘, very broadly speaking,’] a goal<sup>27</sup>.



Given that in ex. 41 the verb is a passive form, there is a reduction of the number of arguments. One expects to find a patient and a beneficiary, the agent now being optional and expressed, if needed, by a peripheral adjunct outside the argument structure. The hearer/reader is prompted to find a subject (i.e. a patient) for *in.tw*. The nor-

25 See now Uljas (2009: Earlier Egyptian) and Winand (2009b: Late Egyptian) for a detailed analysis.

26 There also remains the possibility of analyzing *hn* as an infinitive (but this seems to be less convincing according to Peust 2007: 72-77); in this case, there is no need of any kind of zero, because the antecedent plays the role of the first argument of the infinitive (cf. in French “le bateau que j’ai fait partir”).

27 I do not here enter into the detail of the possible subcategorizations of the thematic role of GOAL into a BENEFICIARY and a DESTINATION.

mal step to take if the surface structure does not provide him with a suitable one is to look for it in what precedes (anaphoric move). This is precisely what is happening here. The fact that the main verb (*rdi*) is conjugated in a relative form indisputably favours such a move.

### Ø in so-called ‘omission under relevance’

As I have shown elsewhere, the omission of an argument is not exceptional in Egyptian, at least in case of the second direct argument (Winand 2004). Omission can also be found with the first argument (the subject), the second indirect object (for instance the PrepPhrase with telic movement verbs), and with the third argument, for instance with the verb *rdi* ‘to give’.

- 46: *sḏm.i*      *sft*      *p-n-nṣ.t-t3.wy*,   *iw*   *bwpwy.i*      *ptr* Ø   *m*   *ir.t.i*  
 hear\PF.1S      butcher P.,                      CIRC NEG.PF.1S      see\INF with eye.1S  
 “I heard the butcher P., but I did not see (him) with my own eyes.”  
 (KRI VI 775,16-776,1)

- 47: *hr*   *iw*   *bwpw.s*      *ḳrs*      *p3y.s*      *it*,  
 but CIRC NEG.PF.3FS      bury\INF ART.POSS.3FS      father,  
*hr*   *bwpw*   *n3y.s*      *hrd.w*      *ḳrs* Ø  
 but NEG.PF      ART.POSS.3FS      child.PL      bury  
 “although she did not bury her father, and although her children did not bury (him)”  
 (KRI V 450,1-2)

One should stress once more the necessity of drawing a careful distinction between the omission and the deletion of an argument, see Winand (2006: 125). This is especially important as regards the second argument. When the second argument is deleted, it triggers a change in the verbal Aktionsart (see the next section). When an argument is omitted, the verbal Aktionsart is left unchanged. As is evident from my translations, the tolerance for omitting the second argument can vary considerably. For instance, in English and in French one is frequently tempted to add the omitted element in brackets, and this is probably what often prompts us to add a zero in Egyptian, because we feel that something is missing. Now, adding a zero – unless it is a pedagogical one – is once more probably unnecessary. One must assume that the reader/hearer is syntactically sufficiently informed to look for the missing element. When the verbal valency is known from the lexicon, the expected move is to find out how the argumental structure can be best saturated. In the majority of cases, the missing object is cotextually present, as is the case in my examples. So, the first strategy is to look for it anaphorically. If this is not successful, the missing argument will be searched cataphorically or in the pragmatic extra-linguistic context (cf. English “give!” [for “give it to me!”] or French “donne!” [for “donne-le moi!”] with an extra-linguistic object that can be pointed at by the finger, and a beneficiary identical to the speaker, a very common situation at speech act).

As shown by the next pair of examples, the omission of the pronoun in such circumstances is not necessary. The choice can be dictated by stylistic or diachronic reasons; it can also be lexically conditioned: all these hypotheses still need to be checked in detail.

- 48: *iw mdw.k n.i nm wi hr sdm st*  
 ENUNC.AUX speak\INACC.2MS to.1S NEG DEP.PR.1S on hear\INF DEP.PR.3PL  
 “you speak to me, but I am not listening to it”  
 (ShS 73-75)

Classical Egyptian

- 49: *hr bn twk (hr) sdm Ø*  
 but NEG PR.PR.1.2MS (on) hear\INF  
 “but you are not listening”  
 (LEM 101,11)

Late Egyptian

In a previous *LingAeg* paper (Winand 2004a), I suggested the following criteria that often trigger the omission of the second argument in Late Egyptian.

The verbal *Aktionsart*:

the omission of the object is more frequent with telic verbs.

The definiteness of the referent:

the higher the object is on this scale, the more prone it is to be omitted.

The animacy scale:

the higher the object is on this scale, the less probably it will be omitted.

The grammatical tenses:

a non-specific object – be it generic or non-generic – is much more inclined to be omitted when the verb is conjugated with an inaccompli.

### Ø showing a reduction of valency

As already noted above, a missing argument may be a signal of valency reduction. The referent of the missing argument can be semantically generic – examples are quite numerous with consumption verbs like *wnm* and *swr* (cf. ex. 50) – or there can be no retrievable referent. In this latter case the verbal *Aktionsart* can be deeply modified. The best-known effect is a de-telicisation process, see Winand (2006: 127-129):

- 50: *iw.f wnm.f Ø swr.f Ø*  
 ENUNC.AUX.3MS eat\INACC.3MS drink\INACC.3MS  
*m-b3h wsir r<sup>c</sup> nb*  
 before Osiris day every  
 “he eats and drinks before Osiris everyday”  
 (Pap. Nu, 23)<sup>28</sup>

- 51: *3h n irr Ø*  
 useful to do\PTCP.INACC  
 “useful for him who acts”  
 (St. Berlin 7311, k 2 = *ÄIB* I, 180)<sup>29</sup>

The accomplishment verb *iri* ‘do’ [+DUR, +DYN, +TEL] undergoes a de-telicizing process when its second argument is deleted; its meaning then shifts from ‘do’ to ‘act’<sup>30</sup>.

28 See Lapp (1997: pl. 48, 23).

29 Cf. *wnn.f hr hdb Ø*, *iw.i hr s<sup>c</sup>nh Ø* “as he slaughters, I give live” (St. Caire JE 49566, l. 11-12, see Černý 1969).

30 Without jumping too quickly to unfounded conclusions, one can observe that, in the translation language, the non-presence of a generic object in ex. 50 does not have the same consequence as the deletion of the second argument in ex. 51.

It is not clear if one may safely posit a zero in this case. Verbs that are statistically more frequently used with one argument (monovalent verbs) can sometimes take an additional argument. Having a second argument usually means a restriction of the activity to a definite goal, which makes the verb telic. In such cases it is highly questionable whether one should insert a zero in the argument structure when the verb is used intransitively. Reduction of valency should thus be treated in the same spirit. If a zero is to be kept after all, it can only be a pedagogical one and its role will be to signal the change of status of the verb.

### Ø in place of a syntactic constituent

A zero is sometimes introduced when a syntactic constituent is missing. One should always be particularly cautious before introducing a zero in a paradigm. I will here examine two possible candidates that raise different problems.

The first case deals with the expression of the subject in a relative clause. In Middle Egyptian, the following opposition is standard:

52a: *ḥm.t ntt m pr.s*  
 woman.F REL.F in house.3FS  
 “the woman who is in her home”

52b: *ḥm.t ntt wi ḥn<sup>c</sup>.s*  
 woman.F REL.F DEP.PR.1S with.3FS  
 “the woman with whom I am”

If the referent of the subject in the relative clause is identical with that of the antecedent (ex. a), the subject is not overtly expressed. According to the grammatical tradition, the subject is said to be expressed by the relative pronoun, which agrees in number and gender with the antecedent. If the referent of the subject plays another syntactic role (ex. b), the subject is necessarily expressed; the relative pronoun still agrees with the antecedent.

In Late Egyptian, the situation has obviously changed. Consider the following three paradigmatic examples:



53a: *t3 ḥm.t nty m p3y.i pr*  
 DEF.F woman.F REL in POSS.ART.1S house  
 “the woman who is in my home”

53b: *p3 nty iw.f r sdm.i*  
 DEF.M REL FIII{.3MS } hear\INF.1S  
 “the one who will hear me”

53c: *p3 nty bwpw.f sdm.i*  
 DEF.M REL NEG.PF.3MS hear\INF.1S  
 “the one who did not hear me”

Two important features are to be noted: first, the relative pronoun has become invariable (ex. a); second, there are a lot of patterns where the subject is expressed even if its referent is identical with that of the antecedent (ex. b and c). Of course, in the Present I, the subject is not expressed if its referent is identical with the antecedent



54:  $p^3$  *nty-~~iw~~.k* (   $i[m]$   
 DEF.S REL-*iw*.2MS there  
 “the (place) where you are” (*LES* 63,8-9)<sup>32</sup>

$p^3 nty$	no subject overtly expressed	no resumptive pron.	ex. $p^3 nty irm.i$
$p^3 nty$	+ subject	+ resumptive pron.	ex. $p^3 nty twi irm.f$
* $p^3 nty$	no subject overtly expressed	+ resumptive pron.	
* $p^3 nty$	+ subject	no resumptive pron.	

55a: (as for the one among them who laid his hand on mine)  
*iw.i*      *r*    *di*                  *n.f*                  *ʒ.t.i*  
 FIII{.1S } give\INF to.3MS goods.F.1S  
 “I will give him my goods”

33 One exception is *im* in *bw nty twi im* ‘the place where I am’ (in parallel with *bw nty twi im.f*). *im* is probably better analysed as an adverb, in which case no zero is needed; but there remains the possibility to analyse it as the pronominal state of *m*, which prompts the reader to look for a pronoun.

55b: (as for he who did not give to me)

*bn iw.i r di n.f m 3h.t.i*  
 NEG FIII{.1S } give\INF to.3MS in goods.f.1S

“I will not give him of my goods”

(KRI VI 238,1-2)

In the first part of the ex., *3h.t.i* is the direct object of *r di*, whereas in the second part *3h.t.i* is introduced by the preposition *m*. Although the object is totally affected by the action in a), the meaning is clearly partitive in b)<sup>34</sup>. In the literature, the indirect expression of the object is known as Direct Object Marking or DOM. The use of DOM with partitive object is not at all consistent in pre-Coptic Egyptian. The issue here is whether there is some ground for considering the possibility of having a zero in the object slot in sentences like the following:

56: *iw swr.f Ø m mw šnš*  
 CIRC drink\PF.3MS in water putrid  
 “after having drunk some putrid water”

(LEM 26,12)

At first sight, analyzing such a sentence as having a direct object expressed by zero seems to be a futile complication. Now, Late Egyptian has a special strategy when a partitive could be in the subject slot in a passivized sentence. In such cases, *nkt* regularly shows up, so that its presence could be accounted for as the lexical materialization of an element missing elsewhere (ex. 57). In ex. 58, the presence of *nkt* is required as the pivot of the circumstantial sentence that follows.

57: *ir di.k in.tw nkt im.sn*  
 if give\SUBJ.2MS bring\SUBJ.PASS something in.3PL  
 “if you let something of them be brought”

(KRI III 545,10)

58: *ir iry.tw nkt iw.f imn,*  
 if do\SUBJ.PASS something CIRC.3MS hide\PSP,  
*wnn ir.t.k hr ptr.f*  
 be\PROSP eye.2MS on see\INF.3MS  
 “If something hidden is done, your eye will keep seeing it.”

(LEM 15,16)<sup>35</sup>

*Nkt* can also be used in DOM (ex. 59). In this case, *m nkt* contrasts with the omission of the direct object (ex. 60):

59: *bwpw.i h3p m nkt r.t m hrw.t n ʿnh*  
 NEG.PF.1S conceal\INF in something to.2FS in day.2FS of life  
 “I did not conceal anything from you in your days of life.”

(P. Leyde I 371,17-18)<sup>36</sup>

60: *dd.f bwpw.i ptr Ø gr*  
 say\PF.3MS NEG.PF.1S see\INF at all  
 “He said: I did not see (anything) at all”

(KRI VI 775,13; cf. KRI VI 777,6)

34 In this particular ex. one should also note that the presence of negation favours the use of an indirect construction (Winand in press: ex. 13, 19, 32, 33).

35 Cf. in a different environment *ist bw ir.k šh3y wʿ-n nfr m-r-pw wʿ-n nkt iw iry.i sw n.k* “Can you not remember a good thing or something that I did for you?” (LES 17,7-8).

36 See Gardiner & Sethe (1928: pl. 7-8).

But even in negative sentences, *nkt* can quite frequently appear in the object slot (ex. 61)<sup>37</sup>:

61: *iw.w hr dd: bwpw.n sdm nkt*  
 SEQ.3PL on say\INF NEG.PF.1PL hear\INF something  
 “and they said: we did not hear anything” (KRI IV 303,5)

Despite a vague similarity, the two constructions (verb + *m* + NP vs. verb + *nkt* + *m* NP) are different. As far as I can see, *nkt* seems to emerge in LEg with a fully lexical meaning. This seems particularly evident in the negative constructions, where *nkt* seems to act as a focussing device. Compare in this respect ex. 60 and 61, where *nkt* appears to stand in opposition to *gr(w)*, a particle that is frequently found in the negative pattern but never underwent a process of grammaticalization similar to *iw n3*. Thus, the primary paradigmatic opposition in LEg is not between verb + *nkt* + *m* NP and a questionable verb +  $\emptyset$  + *m* + NP, but between verb + NP vs. verb + *m* + NP. If this is correct, there is no more need of a zero.

### $\emptyset$ thought to be necessary to satisfy the postulates of a syntactic theory

It should be clear from the outset that we all work within a theoretical frame. The perspective from which I have been considering the potential existence of zeros is roughly speaking a structuralist one.

There is a particular type of zero I would like to briefly discuss before concluding this paper, namely the zero that has been postulated in constructions like *iw/mk sdm.n.f* in the general frame of the Standard Theory<sup>38</sup>. According to Polotsky, the suffix-conjugation forms that appear in complex patterns like *iw sdm.f/sdm.n.f* or *h<sup>c</sup>.n sdm.n.f* are identical to the forms used in clauses of circumstance. Polotsky (1965: 20–21) himself was a bit elusive in his analysis of the constituents of those complex patterns<sup>39</sup>, but he seemed to admit that such forms were morphologically circumstantial forms. In the Standard Theory, constructions like *mk/iw sdm.f/sdm.n.f* are analyzed as adverbial predicates<sup>40</sup>; *iw sdm.n.f* is thus interpreted, strictly speaking, as “it is after having heard”<sup>41</sup>. In other words, circumstantial forms need a subject because they are embedded in the adverbial predicate frame. Junge (1989), in his *Syntax der Literatursprache*, considered *iw* as the subject of the adverbial predication where the *sdm.f/sdm.n.f* was the predicate. In *Emphasis*, the role of subject resurfaced; Junge was not very explicit about it, but from his analysis of a simple sentence like *mk*

37 Cf. *bw ir.k di.t nkt n w<sup>c</sup>* (KRI VI 155,15); *bw gm.s nkt r db3* (LEM 105,11); *m ir dd nkt* (KRI VI 268,4); *bw ir.tn di.t n.i nkt* (KRI VI 760,3); *p3-wn nn iw.f r ir.t nkt* (LES 26,4); *m ir mr n.k nkt n imn-r<sup>c</sup>-nswt-ntr.w* (LES 70,7–8).

38 A good résumé, with a critical perspective, can be found in Schenkel (1990); see also Winand (2007).

39 Cf. Depuydt (1983: 45), who stresses that the Standard Theory is mainly a theory of syntax.

40 Polotsky (1976: § 3.8.4): “un temps ‘indicatif’ de l’égyptien classique est donc une phrase à prédicat circonstanciel. Il se compose d’un auxiliaire sujet et d’un auxiliaire prédicat”.

41 Erman (1894: § 294–295) already interpreted the *sdm.f* of *iw sdm.f* as a circumstantial form. For Polotsky, the most obvious explanation of the constitutive elements of the construction was that Egyptian avoided after *iw* the repetition of the subject already appended to the *sdm.f*-form. For a critique of this use of a pro-form, see Collier (1992: 56).

*šps.wt hr šdw*, it can be deduced that he analyzed *mk sdm.n.f* as *mk* [S [Ø]<sub>noun subj.</sub> [*sdm.n.i st*]<sub>adv.pred.</sub>]<sup>42</sup>. This, however, led to more problems than solutions, as was recognized later, see e.g., Collier (1990: 78 note 26; 1992).

## Conclusion

After this brief review, which does not pretend to be exhaustive, the number of serious candidates to be accepted as linguistic zeros has dramatically shrunk to almost nothing. Two basic requirements must be satisfied: the potential zero must be part of a paradigmatic substitution table, and it must be assigned a meaning (*signifié*). *Prima facie*, several candidates seem to pass the first test. But if one expands the paradigm to encompass the whole syntactic construction under consideration, one is usually forced to recognize that the would-be zero does not stand in opposition to anything<sup>43</sup>. As already suggested, one should strictly contrast zero as a linguistic sign and *nil*, the absence of a mark. Of course, zero as a typographical mark can be used to underline a special construction (pedagogical zero), or to signal a historical evolution, especially in phonology and morphology.

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42 For Polotsky (1965: 21), the most obvious explanation of the constitutive elements of the construction was that Egyptian avoided after *hw* the repetition of the subject already appended to the *sdm.f*-form.

43 On a more general, cross-linguistic and typological perspective, see Lemaréchal (1998). There are obviously also other zeros at every stage of Egyptian that should be shot down. The hunting season is on all year!

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